



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 2
290 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, NY 10007-1866

October 28, 2005

Mr. Douglas A. Currey
Regional Director
NYSDOT Region 11
Hunters Point Plaza
47-40 21st Street
Long Island City, New York 11101

Dear Mr. Currey:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the draft EIS for the project entitled **Willis Avenue Bridge Reconstruction, Bronx County and New York County, New York** (CEQ #20050353). Our review was conducted pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

The Federal Highway Administration, in cooperation with the New York State Department of Transportation and the New York City Department of Transportation, propose to replace the Willis Avenue Bridge over the Harlem River in Bronx County and New York County, New York. Of the alternatives considered only the off-line replacement with a new swing span and new steel approaches is identified as being feasible and is therefore, the preferred alternative. While we generally would not consider the complete evaluation of only one alternative to be a rigorous NEPA alternatives evaluation, the draft EIS did contain enough information on the other alternatives to understand the reasons for their elimination. Based upon our review we have the following comments.

Our primary concern with the draft EIS is that the impacts from the removal of the old bridge were not definitively described and evaluated. For example, the draft EIS did not evaluate the impacts to the Harlem River from the removal of the piers and structures of the original bridge, in addition to the impacts from the construction of the new bridge and the dredging for the submarine cables. The draft EIS also did not discuss the handling, disposal, and final disposition of such removed bridge structures as the stone and masonry and other materials that make up the swing span pier in the Harlem River, the steel structures that are coated with lead based paint, the decking and span structures, and the fenders and pier abutments at the ends of the bridge. All of the issues relating to the deconstruction and removal of the old bridge should be thoroughly discussed in the final EIS.

Internet Address (URL) • <http://www.epa.gov>

Recycled/Recyclable • Printed with Vegetable Oil Based Inks on Recycled Paper (Minimum 50% Postconsumer content)

In a related matter, we are concerned with the impacts from dredging the river for the realigned navigational channels. Of particular note is that the swing span pier for the old bridge would lie in the realigned navigational channel, yet, the draft EIS did not address this issue and how the realigned channel would be dredged given this and any other difficulties related to achieving the required depths. We suggest that the final EIS contain more detailed information regarding the dredging activities and the disposal techniques that will be used for the materials removed from the Harlem River.

The draft EIS states that a new road to the Waste Management transfer facility will be needed since during construction the project would not provide enough clearance for trucks to access the site. The draft EIS disclosed that the road will result in the construction of a new bulkhead and placement of some fill in the Harlem River, which would be a minor impact given the size of the area and the amount of fill, and that these impacts would be mitigated. However, the draft EIS did not discuss if the road would be removed once construction was finished. The final EIS should address whether the road would be permanent or temporary and what actions would be taken to remove it once the project is completed. We also suggest that the final EIS provide a table and a map detailing the areas of impact to the Harlem River, the type of riverine environment that is impacted, and the mitigation that is offered for those impacts.

The draft EIS discussed the opportunity for new and improved stormwater controls with the advent of this project. Stormwater on the bridge and road surfaces would be conveyed to an enclosed drainage system with scuppers carrying the water to grade. The stormwater collected on the spans over the Harlem River Yard would be conveyed in an independent system separate from the rail yard's with a new outfall. We support the stormwater controls offered as part of the project and would recommend that the final EIS discuss the specific Best Management Practices that will be utilized, such as catch basins or detention/separation structures for the new system and whether or not the runoff from the rail yard can also be captured in this system. In addition to these Best Management Practices we strongly recommend that the final EIS discuss measures that will provide diligent oversight of the construction contractor's actions in order to minimize any accidental spills or discharges to the Harlem River and a commitment to those in the Record of Decision.

In conclusion, based on our review and in accordance with EPA policy, we have rated this draft EIS as EC-2, indicating that we have environmental concerns (EC) about the impacts to water quality, specifically the Harlem River. Accordingly, additional information (2), as outlined in this letter, should be presented in the final EIS to address these issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Should you have any questions concerning this letter, please contact David Carlson of my staff at (212) 637-3502.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JF" or "JS", written over a horizontal line.

John Filippelli, Chief
Strategic Planning and Multi-Media Programs Branch